



The LINK

for Child Care Professionals



Washington State
Department of Social
& Health Services

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How to stay in business and offer quality child care

By Gail Gosney, Child Care and Business
Development Program Manager

Sound like a fairy tale? Well, it does get harder every day. Businesses of all sizes face layoffs, split shifts, mergers and restructuring. Employees face shortened hours – or longer – reduced pay (or at least not any pay raises), split shifts and/or multiple jobs to make ends meet.

You know the impact of these modern-day realities on your business only too well. Shifting enrollments, more part-time enrollments, even more difficulty collecting child care fees cause you to ask: “How can I provide quality care for these children, AND keep my teachers, and have some money left to run the business (and maybe pay myself)?”

There also is the factor of increased competition. Child care is one of the fastest growing business industries in the country with many businesses offering onsite or near-site child care services, churches contracting out space to child care centers, and schools now opening preschools or child care centers on school grounds.

There is growing competition, many “customers” with very few resources, and increasing costs (personnel, training, equipment, insurance, food, transportation, etc.). *And Boeing thinks it has business troubles?* What can you, the child care provider and business owner, do?

Revisit the basics of sound business practices for small businesses. Small businesses all face stiff competition, rising costs and shifting consumer demand. Many don’t make it – as the dot.com companies found out. However, many do because they constantly keep track of *consumer needs*, *customer satisfaction*, and *cost controls*.

Consumer needs

In business jargon, this is referred to as “niche marketing” or “how do I lure that customer away from the other guy?” In child care, you are focused on the needs of the children – as you should be – but may not always think about what attracts families to your child care business. What makes one child care home or center different from, and

more desirable than, the one down the street?

Do you offer care at hours not typically offered elsewhere? Do you specialize in one type of care (infant-toddler care, after-school care, care for special needs children, care for bilingual children, etc.)? Is that specialty available anywhere nearby?

Many child care businesses are aware of how their care is different from (or similar to) other child care providers. However, they may not be communicating the unique features of their service to prospective families.

To make sure that potential customer families are aware of your services and what makes your business unique from others in your area:

- Make an inventory of what you offer;
- Talk to Child Care Resource and Referral and other child care providers/associations to get a sense of how your services may be distinguished from other child care businesses;
- If there is little difference, determine if there is a specific type of care or service need that is not being met. Could your services be modified or adapted to meet those needs?
- How do you advertise or promote your child care service – how do people find out about you? Do families really get a good sense of how your child care services are unique from others in your area?
- Write up flyers, brochures, Web sites, business cards and/or advertisements that help prospective families know why they should choose your care for their child(ren).
- Then ask the HARD question: “Is my service that unique – could anyone else provide the child care I offer?” If your enrollments are consistently low and you answered “no” to that question, is it time to look at merging with another child care business in your area?

Customer satisfaction

Once you are at licensed capacity – or have as many children in your care as you want to have – review whether or not you are retaining children and their families in care. Are your families satisfied with the care they receive? Family decisions about care for their children can have little to do with the quality or type of care their children receive. Yet families also make choices based on: child/caregiver relations, how the facility looks, staff stability, quality of care and education received, the parents’ relationship with the child care provider, and hours and location.

Child care businesses are heavily dependent on repeat business from families and word-of-mouth referrals. If your business is down, it may be due to external economic or other factors. Or it could be that your child care services don’t meet the needs of the families you want to serve. It could also be a matter of communication. It is difficult to find time to communicate with each family while you are ensuring that each child is well-cared for. Yet parents make the decisions that keep your child care business full or not.

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Director Rachael Langen
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Subsidy News

By DCCEL Program Managers

Licensed Provider invoice tips

INVOICE CORRECTLY – AVOID AN OVERPAYMENT

- The child must attend child care at least one day during the month for you to claim any payment for that month.
- Full-time full-day authorizations are for 22 days of care. You may claim all days of the authorization if the child does not exceed five days of absence. Please refer to page 11 of Child Care Subsidies: A Booklet for Licensed and Certified Child Care Providers. (If you need a copy, please contact your licensor.)
- No absence days are allowed for authorizations of less than 22 days. You may only bill the actual number of days the child attends under that authorization.
- Full-time half-day authorizations are for 22 days of care, absence days are claimed as above. Up to 30 half-days may be authorized. The extra 8 half-days allow you to invoice an additional half-day when more than 5 hours of care are provided to a child in a day. Absence days are not allowed for these extra half days - bill only the number of days of care.
- Full-day care is five or more hours a day. If a child is authorized for full-day care but regularly uses less than five hours of care a day, contact the authorizing worker to have the authorization changed to half-day.
- If an authorized service duplicates another authorized service, bill for it only once. You may not bill twice for the same service provided to a child in the same month.
- If the parent's schedule changes and the child needs more or less care than is authorized, the parent needs to contact the authorizer to have the authorization corrected. DSHS can only pay for care that is authorized for the parent's approved activities.
- Full-time authorizations include official state holidays. Do not count them as absence days. Any day that you are closed other than an official state holiday is a closure day. You must subtract closure days from your total number of invoiced days. Please refer to pages 17-18 I Child Care Subsidies: A Booklet for Licensed and Certified Child Care Providers.
- Keep your attendance records, as required by the Minimum Licensing Requirements, at your site for five years. Attendance records need to be available to the licensor upon request.
- Minimum Licensing Requirements for attendance records vary for homes and centers. Best practice is to list time-in and time-out and to have parent signatures for all children attending. Contact your licensor if you have any questions about the requirements.
- Fill out your monthly DSHS invoice based on a careful review of your attendance records.
- Not keeping accurate records may result in an overpayment. Overpayments are written for the entire amount if you do not have attendance records.

INVOICE CORRECTLY – AVOID AN OVERPAYMENT.

Ask your licensor

By Marta Hernandez
Region 2 Family Home Licensor

What should I look for when I hire an assistant?

An assistant teacher should enjoy working with children from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and be able to handle home or classroom situations with fairness and patience. Assistants must also demonstrate initiative and a willingness to follow directions from his/her employer as well as the lead worker in a classroom.

Most important, an assistant you choose needs to be caring, nurturing, warm, and respectful of children as individuals. An assistant should recognize the needs of working parents and have the ability to work with parents for the benefit of the children in care.

The home or center assistant must meet WAC 388-150-180 or 388-155-180 Staffing—Qualifications.

General qualifications for assistant:

- Fourteen years of age or older for homes and sixteen years or older for centers
- Eighteen years of age or older if assigned sole responsibility for the child in care
- Complete a satisfactory criminal background check
- Complete a Tuberculosis test
- Trained in CPR and First Aid
- Complete an HIV/AIDS awareness class
- Be competent to exercise appropriate judgments
- Be of good character
- Have the understanding, ability, personality, emotional stability, and physical health to meet the cultural emotional, mental, physical, and social needs of the child in care
- Not have committed or been convicted of child abuse or any crime involving physical harm to another person

Contact your licensor to obtain the necessary forms to qualify your assistant.

The LINK

The Link is a quarterly publication of the Division of Child Care and Early Learning (DCCEL), Economic Services Administration, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), for child care professionals. Send questions, comments, or ideas to the Coordinator, The Link, DSHS/DCCEL, P.O. Box 45480, Olympia, WA 98504-5480.

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Check out free resources

Check out the great resources located on the Do2Learn Web site at <http://www.do2learn.com/>. In addition to teacher tips, this site offers information on items available free, including 350 picture cards, games that teach safety skills, emotions, and color, art projects for the summer, plus recommended books for parents and teachers.

How to stay in business *(continued from page 1)*

To determine customer satisfaction and ensure your services are meeting the needs of your families:

- Survey your families periodically (if you have a large child care center) or talk to your families about what they like most and what they would like to have improved for their children. Let parents know in a positive way how you will respond to their comments AND what they can do to help you meet their needs.
- Look at your facility – does it convey the message of loving care, fun, learning and growth that you want parents to see? Even minor repairs and spring cleaning can make a big difference.
- Talk to your staff (or look at your own lesson plans) – are they meeting the needs of the children you care for and do they keep families interested in coming back? Are there other services, curriculum or activities that you can introduce to keep families and have them praising you all over town?
- Do you have a clear, easy-to-read, accurate parent handbook and updates that tells families your hours, services, expectations, fees, etc.? Do you have simple ways of communicating to parents how unique services contribute to the growth and well-being of their child(ren)?
- Update your waiting list every quarter to make sure that families on your list would really use your care. This task will help you keep in contact with prospective customers and also let you know if and when you will have openings for new families.

Cost controls

Small businesses set their prices/fees based on *their cost* to produce/serve, plus overhead (rent, utilities, etc.) plus the profit they want to make. Consumers buy based on quality, convenience and cost. Yet, as you know all too well, your fees are based on the “market rate” of child care in your area and not on a profit level above your true costs. (You may be laughing wildly now at the suggestion of profits, but hang in there a little longer.)

Most child care businesses carefully manage their income. They have sliding fee scales, activity or special service fees, DSHS bonuses for infant and special needs care, late fees, service charges for bad checks, USDA food subsidies, parent fund-raisers and any other source of revenue available.

Parents seldom pay the true cost of child care. To stay competitive and take home *some* money, take a hard look at your budget to make sure you are keeping your costs as low as possible.

- Facility costs for child care centers should be about six percent of the total annual budget, less for home-based child care businesses. Can lease or rent costs be reduced by offering the landlord a number of “reserved slots” for his/her employees or employees of nearby businesses?
- Personnel costs should not exceed 80 percent of a child care business’ total budget. Since teacher quality and longevity is *the* link to quality child care, parents can (and should) be approached about fee increases related to teacher raises. Parents are often more receptive to this reason for fee increases than child care providers believe.
- Staff benefits may be possible at reasonable rates through group offerings, such as the local Chamber of Commerce or Family Child Care Association or NAEYC.
- Facility improvements and equipment purchases to upgrade your services and

meet licensing requirements are very necessary, but *not* part of your ongoing operating budget. Two Web sites, <http://www.oted.wa.gov/ed/businessassistance.html> and www.childcarenet.org/ list some sources of funding available for capital improvements. Also, parents may be willing to help raise funds for *specific* facility improvements.

- Reduce costs for supplies and equipment through buying co-ops with other child care businesses, using curriculum resources offered by child care resource and referral agencies, using resources offered by the local public health department and the library and making use of commercial discounts offered to schools.
- Regarding salaries, the child care owner/director should not make disproportionately more than the staff. More frequently, the opposite problem occurs; child care owners/directors may be the last to get paid or may not take pay for months on end. This is equally as damaging and leads to resentment, burnout and sometimes business closure. Owner/director compensation should be in line with other staff salaries and paid just like other salaries.

The businesses strategies listed above are not magic; they are basic business practices. However, small businesses struggle and often fail because they did not pay attention to the basics. And like the tortoise, “slow and steady wins the race.”

Product Recalls

According to the Centers for Disease Control, injuries are the number one cause of death for children under nineteen years of age. Nationally, 69,100 children under the age of five were treated for in an emergency room for injuries related to nursery equipment in 2000. Two children died in recalled cribs in Washington in 2000. Below is a list of some of the recent recalled items. Please go to the Internet site: www.cpsc.gov for more detailed information.

PRODUCT NAME AND DATE OF RECALL	COMPANY
Children's Soap Making Kit 03/2002 Contact manufacturer at 800-272-9667 or visit Web site at www.roseart.com	Rose Art Industries
Girl's Garments 02/2002 Contact manufacturer at 800-282-4674 or visit Web site at www.oshkoshgosh.com	Oshkosh B' Gosh Inc
Children's Books 02/2002 Contact manufacturer at 800-493-0009 or Web site at www.randomhouse.com	Random House Inc
Pedal Cars 02/2002 Pedal Car Company Consumers can contact Alpha International at 800-368-6367	Alpha International/Gearbox
Plush Snuggle Bears 02/2002 Contact manufacturer at 800-896-9479 or visit Web site at www.Snuggletime.com	Unilever Home and Personal Care USA
Snack and Activity Trays 02/2002 Contact manufacturer at 800-345-4109 or visit Web site at www.gracobaby.com	Graco Children's Products Inc

Step no. 1: Develop your business plan

By Gail Gosney, Child Care and Business Development Program Manager

Business experts say developing a written business plan is the most important thing you can do before beginning a business. Existing businesses should continually update their plans. A business plan is a blueprint for your business, today and as it grows. A thoroughly researched and well thought-out business plan will clarify goals, focus your energy, direct your work, and measure your progress. Business plans are also necessary when asking for business loans from banks or other investors.

Before beginning a business plan, determine if your personal goals, resources and strengths are compatible with your business goals. Preparing a business plan will also allow you to evaluate your commitment to starting a small business and determine what other resources you will need.

The business plan does not need to be long, probably not more than 10 pages, plus financial statements. If you are just starting your business, you need to project your first year's income and expenses. You can get information about financial projections from your local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency, from existing child care businesses (some may not be willing to share all their information) or from your nearest Small Business Development Center.

For more business plan information, check out Internet Web sites such as www.sba.gov and www.score.org. For further assistance in preparing a business plan, contact your nearest Small Business Development Center. For contact information for Small Business Development Centers, check out www.oted.wa.gov/ed/sbr. You can also contact Gail Gosney, Child Care Business Liaison at (360) 725-4034 or gailg@cted.wa.gov.

Plan Summary

The Plan Summary is a one- or two-page summary describing your business to prospective lenders and investors. A well-developed plan will help convince lenders or investors to examine your business further. Even though a Plan Summary appears first in your business plan, you should write it last.

Your Plan Summary should include:

1. A brief description of the company's history
2. Description of products and services
3. How you intend to deliver the service
4. Management
5. What it will take to make a profit; also called a break-even analysis

6. How much money you are seeking (if applicable)
7. How you will pay the money back (if applicable).

Purpose of the Business

1. What you want to accomplish
2. Mission statement
3. Description of the business

Product & Service Defined

1. The market that needs your product or service (you can get some of this information from your local CCR&R agency)
2. A complete description of your service
3. The cost and profit of each service. Describe the break-even point
4. The major sources of competition (check with CCR&R)
5. Opportunities to better develop your service

Market Analysis

1. Market research. Size of market and how long has it existed. Barriers to your business entry and growth
2. Target market. Who will buy your service?
3. Where most of your sales occur
4. How much do you expect to sell? (How many children will you serve – this is different from the number of licensed slots you have.)

Market Strategy

1. Define your advantage. What is the difference between your service and your competitors?
2. Evaluate the competition. What is the size of your competition? Market maturity?
3. Pricing Strategy. Is your price competitive?
4. Promotion. How will you tell others of your product or service?

Management

1. Identify your organizational structure and key employees
2. Provide a resume for each person
3. Identify management skills
4. Professional services
5. Identify any technical or specialty services

Schedule of Events

1. List critical dates
2. Make short-term goals
3. Project long-term goals
4. Identify barriers or risks—solutions

Financial Information

1. Financial statement
2. List your start-up expenses
3. Funding
4. Equity—owner's investments
5. Financing

6. Monthly cash-flow analysis. How you will pay creditors, personnel, and bills? When will you receive payment for sales?
7. Sales forecast
8. Income projection
9. Operation expenses
10. Methods of financial reporting you will use
11. Break-even analysis
12. Balance sheet—assets and liabilities

Reprinted from Guide for Small Businesses in Washington State, Office of Trade and Economic Development, May 2001.

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Call (253) 854-2565 ext. 13 to be placed on the mailing list.

Look for new business resource manuals at your local Resource and Referral agency.

Separate manuals are available for family home providers and child care center directors.

Director's Corner

*By Rachael Langen, Director
Division of Child Care and Early
Learning*

Quality Assurance Initiatives

The Division of Child Care and Early Learning (DCCEL) establishes clear standards for child care through rules and professional guidelines not only for those we regulate but also for our own staff. These rules and guidelines are defined through Washington Administrative Codes (WAC), guidebooks, policy manuals, and memos that interpret state and federal laws. The current rules and guidelines for child care give parents the assurance that child care providers will offer an environment where children are free from harm and receive early learning opportunities. Our state's standards are recognized as some of the most innovative and effective in the nation. But how do we know the rules are being followed?

Quality Assurance is a term used by organizations to describe their processes for ensuring that rules and guidelines are followed. DCCEL staff recently identified some problems with child care subsidy payment accuracy and consistency of child care licensing work practices. As a result, we have decided to implement the following Quality Assurance Initiatives:

Working Connections Child Care (WCCC)

Quality Assurance Project

The WCCC program serves over 70,000 children each month at a cost of over \$250,000,000 each year. Payment authorization information suggests that a significant amount of money is paid to providers in error (duplicate payments, incorrect rates, etc.) and never recovered. We must step-up efforts to recover payments made in error to ensure the continued success of the WCCC program.

This summer DSHS staff will begin reviewing and comparing attendance records with child care subsidy billings and payments. When overpayments are identified, the provider will be asked to repay the disputed amount. These reviews will impact a small number of licensed child care facilities. Our hope is that by drawing attention to the issue of child care subsidy payment errors, providers and authorizing workers will work together to ensure payment accuracy at the time of the initial authorization.

Licensing Practice Improvement Project (LPIP)

The Licensing Practice Improvement Project (LPIP) was established in March as a quality improvement initiative focused on the work of child care licensors. The goal of the project is to identify the differences and similarities in how each region conducts licensing complaint investigations and makes decisions about when to take adverse licensing actions based on a provider's failure to comply with minimum licensing requirements. This information will be used to establish clear and consistent practice guidelines for licensors around the state.

Phase I of the project was initiated in late March and consisted of monitoring Child Protective Services and licensing investigations that occurred in Regions 4a and 4b between March and May of 2001. The monitoring team reviewed both electronic files and case files associated with these investigations and following each through to resolution. The project will continue until a sample of cases in each of the six DSHS regions have been reviewed. Phase I should be completed by the end of 2002.

Phase II of the project will be to select a task force that will review and analyze the data collected by the LPIP team and make recommendations for future improvements. The task force will identify core licensing functions, and decide how to implement best practices consistently around the state.

Note new Poison Control Number
1-800-222-1222

There is a new, nationwide poison control phone number. It is **1-800-222-1222**. It will patch the caller into the nearest local/regional poison control number. The old Washington number will be in use for a while longer, but eventually will be phased out. Please make a note of this new number.

DSHS urges compliance with program rules

By Working Connections Program Managers

A special effort is now underway to ensure WCCC authorizing workers follow the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program rules on provider and DSHS rate comparison in Chapter 388-290 WAC. The rules require DSHS to pay the provider's usual and customary rate or the department's rate, whichever is less.

When you agree to care for a child whose family is eligible for subsidized child care, you should provide your "usual and customary" rate for that child to the authorizing worker. Your usual and customary rate should be based on:

- The child's age
- That child's specific schedule of child care needed, for example:
- Two hours per day, five days per week after school; or
- 10 a.m. until 3 p.m., three days per week, etc.

The authorizing worker will then compare your rate to the department's rate and authorize the lesser of the two rates.

If you receive a Social Service Payment System (SSPS) invoice that shows an authorized rate higher than your usual and customary rate or more than the DSHS maximum rate for that child, you must:

1. Enter the correct rate by writing it in the space below the pre-printed rate;
2. Return the invoice by mail (Invoice Express cannot process a corrected invoice); and
3. Contact the authorizing worker and provide your usual and customary rate.

These instructions are consistent with the procedures described on page 22 of "Child Care Subsidies: A Booklet for Licensed and Certified Child Care Providers," often referred to as the "Provider Booklet."

If you find that the incorrect service is authorized on the invoice, you must notify the authorizing worker so that the correct service can be authorized. For example, if a child is authorized for full-day child care, but the parent consistently brings the child in for less than five hours of care each day, the child should be authorized for half-day rather than full-day care.

If a provider is paid at a higher rate than allowed by program rules or is paid for services not provided (e.g., paid for full-day when half-day payment would have been correct), an overpayment will be assessed to the provider.

Staff from the Division of Child Care and Early Learning will be auditing cases to ensure compliance with these rule requirements.

If you need further assistance, contact 360-413-3268.

Child Passenger Restraint Law

A new child passenger restraint law that affects all child care providers takes effect July 1, 2002. This law is specific on the types of restraint system that must be used in cars depending on the child's age and weight. The requirements for child restraints are:

Appropriately fitting booster seat

The child passenger restraint system requirements in RCW 46.61.687 do not apply to:

- For-hire vehicles (these are limousines, taxis, buses, etc. – not child care providers);
- Vehicles designed to transport sixteen or less passengers, including the driver, operated by auto transportation companies, as defined in RCW 81.68.010;
- Vehicles providing customer shuttle service between parking, convention, and hotel facilities and airport terminals; and
- School buses.

If you transport children, you must have the right type of passenger restraint for the age and weight of the children. The new addition to the law is the booster seat requirement for children between four and six. There are several brands and several types available. When you buy a booster seat, be sure that it has a label stating: "This child restraint system conforms to all applicable U.S. Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards." Then you will meet the requirement.

The law that applies is Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 46.61.687, which you can find on the Web at: <http://search.leg.wa.gov/pub/textsearch/ViewRoot.asp?Action=Html&Item=0&X=327080044&p=1>.

You can find more information on booster seats on the Web at: <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/>

AGE	Less than 1 year	More than 1 year, but less than 4 years	At least 4 years, but less than 6 years	Six years or older
WEIGHT	Less than 20 pounds	At least 20 pounds, but less than 40 pounds	At least 40 pounds, pounds but less than 60	More than 60 pounds
RESTRAINT REQUIREMENT	Rear facing infant seat	Forward facing child safety restraint system	Child booster seat	Properly adjusted and fastened vehicle safety belt OR Appropriately fitting booster seat

Pesticide Use

By Sue Biles, R.N., M.N.
DCCEL Health Program Manager

The 2001 state legislature passed a pesticide law that affects child care centers. The new law (RCW 74.15.063) will take effect July 1, 2002 and asks that child care centers comply with requirements outlined in RCW 17.21.415. The law requires child care centers to establish a system for notifying parents or guardians and center employees of pesticide applications. This notification must occur at least 48 hours in advance of the application and must describe the center's pest control policies and methods. The law also mandates child care centers to place a marker at each primary point of entry to the center grounds.

Do all applications of pesticides to child care centers require you to hire a licensed pesticide applicator?

No, you are not always required to hire a licensed pesticide applicator. You or one of your employees may apply nonrestricted-use pesticides. You only need to hire someone when you are applying restricted use pesticides or when pesticides are applied with motorized, mechanical or pressurized power equipment. Then you must have a licensed applicator

because a Public Operator license is required. If you or one of your employees has a Public Operator license, you can also apply restricted use pesticides without hiring a licensed applicator.

For more information on the pesticide requirements, contact Cliff Weed, Department of Agriculture, at (360) 902-2036 or Leslie Edwards-Hill, DCCEL at (360) 413-3289.

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